

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs: Brian Mihlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Greg Speights, Biological Technician, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Pueblo Army Chemical Depot, Pueblo: Max Canestorp, Wildlife Biologist

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park: Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist

June 2012 Accomplishment Report

Partnerships and Accountability

Waldo Canyon Fire: Brian Mihlbachler, Diane Strohm, Greg Speights and Steve Wallace played an integral role in partnering with the Waldo Canyon Fire Incident Command Team



to improve the US Air Force Academy (Academy) portion of an extensively planned fuelbreak in the path of this raging wildfire that began in early June.

The FWS Forestry Team, Diane Strohm and Steve Wallace, have been creating and enhancing strategic fuel breaks across the Academy over the past decade, including the area of particular concern for the Waldo Fire. As the fire approached, they immediately had additional brush removed along the planned fuelbreak. These efforts paid off, as this enabled the Academy Fire Department to halt the section of fire that reached the Academy, and limit the burned area to only 150 acres.



Brian Mihlbachler and Steve Wallace coordinated with the Academy Fire Department and the US

Forest Service (USFS) during the Waldo Canyon Fire and served as fire lookouts, provided logistical support to allow use of Farish Recreation Area as a firefighter spike camp and identified environmentally sensitive areas during fire operations.

FWS-Academy Fire Management meeting: Diane Strohm and Steve Wallace met with Jim Kelton, R6 Fire Management Officer, Bill Waln, Darwin Schultz, and Dave Carter to discuss the Academy Natural Resource Office Wildfire and Fuels Management Program, and review FWS fire organization changes. Diane Strohm will update the five-year Wildland Fire MOU between the agencies this summer.

Military Conservation Partner Award: Bryan Arroyo (former Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation, now the Assistant Director for International



Affairs) presented Colonel Thomas Gibson (10th Air Base Wing Commander, US Air Force Academy) with the Military Conservation Partner Award at a ceremony at the Academy on June 25th.

Site visit to Academy restoration areas: Brian Mihlbachler and Diane Strohm led a site visit to restoration sites on the Academy for Bryan Arroyo, Jarrad Kosa (Sikes Act Coordinator) and military personnel on June 25th.

Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for Buckley AFB: Krystal Phillips responded to comments by internal stakeholders, updated plan to reflect changes, and hand delivered revised package to both the FWS and CO Parks and Wildlife for their respective signatures. This is a huge accomplishment as this document has not had complete signature since 2000!

Coordination for Buckley AFB Wildlife Management Plan mediation: Krystal Phillips crafted statements of work and independent government cost estimates for contractor support to facilitate mediation for the Wildlife Management Plan on Buckley AFB with key internal stakeholders. Conducted market research on three potential GSA contracts and identified suggested source through a formal report.

Coordination for Buckley AFB Natural Resource FY12 projects: Krystal Phillips developed a statement of work totaling \$123K, to be added to the installation Landscape Maintenance Contract in support of natural resources in FY12, including invasive species management, East Toll Gate Creek improvements on Side Creek, East Toll Gate Creek improvements near Outfall #2, and installation of permanent prairie dog metal barriers in critical locations along the installation perimeter fence.

Grounds safety coordination for Buckley AFB "Facility License of Munitions": Krystal Phillips developed standard operating procedures for safe weapons handling and storage of on-site munitions in support of Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) activities.

Sikes Act meeting: Max Canestorp coordinated and hosted the annual Sikes Act meeting on June 18th, at Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD). These meetings are held each year to review the status of PCD's

natural resource programs and projects with the installation's natural resource cooperators.

Meeting with Rocky Mountain National Park Superintendent: Chris Kennedy, Pam Sponholtz and Doug Frugé met with the Superintendent and resource management personnel at Rocky Mountain National Park to discuss upcoming field work projects.

Species Conservation and Management

Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse: Brian Mihlbachler directed the Preble's meadow jumping mouse population sampling and telemetry monitoring work performed by Colorado Natural Heritage Program biologists on the Academy. Project continues long-term field studies on mouse demography and habitat requirements. Brian Mihlbachler initiated informal consultation with FWS Colorado Field Office concerning Preble's habitat impacts during Waldo Canyon Fire operations, primarily from bulldozer line activities near West Monument Creek and Stanley Creek.



In cooperation with Paul Winkle, CO Parks and Wildlife, Kevin Lewis, Federal Correctional Institute (FCI) and Joel Colvin, FWS, Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, Pam Sponholtz conducted an electrofishing and netting survey of Henry's Lake on the Federal Correctional Institution.

Burrowing Owl Surveys: Max Canestorp and Krystal Phillips conducted owl surveys on Buckley AFB, where four active nests have been found to date.

Krystal Phillips reviewed the public comments for the proposed delisting of gray wolf in Wyoming for Region 6 Division of Endangered Species. She volunteered one and a half days at the Regional Office to review a portion of nearly 4,000 public comments and completed 685 reviews.

Migratory Bird surveys: Krystal Phillips coordinated with Buckley AFB entomology personnel to conduct weekly surveys at identified areas for nesting migratory birds and/or wildlife concerns. This is in support the removal of prairie dogs with the use of phostoxin, which has been identified as a BASH issue.

Mercury study: Chris Kennedy, along with volunteers from the local fly fishing club, conducted surveys and collected samples from greenback and Colorado River cutthroat trout from six lakes on Rocky Mountain National Park. These samples will be analyzed by the US Geological Survey.



Greenback cutthroat trout: Pam Sponholtz, along with Leslie Ellwood and Susan Linner (Region 6 Ecological Services) participated in a site visit to Bear Creek on the Pike National Forest on June 6th. Bear Creek is home to a unique population of greenback cutthroat trout and undergone stream restoration to benefit this subspecies, which is listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Leadership in Science and Technology

Forest Health Reconnaissance with USFS Regional Entomologist: Academy forests are suffering, as are much of Colorado's Front Range forests, due to



prolonged drought conditions. Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm hosted a field trip including the Fort Carson forester, several forestry contractors, and a USFS forest health expert. The team looked at trees being affected by an array of tree health issues, including bark beetles, fungal diseases, foliage blights, hail damage, root rot and drought stress. The USFS has partnered with the Academy for years and has provided technical assistance and funds to maintain and enhance forest health.

Beetle collection: Max Canestorp assisted Jerry Michels, Texas A&M University Biocontrol Program, and Tom Royer, extension entomologist with Oklahoma State University, to collect *Diorhabda* beetles (tamarisk beetles) at PCD for Dr. Royer's lab.

Henry's Lake: Pam Sponholtz drafted a report titled "Fishery Survey of Henry's Lake" and included recommendations to achieve a balanced largemouth bass population on Henry's Lake at FCI.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Bark Beetle Surveys and Management: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm performed field surveys to locate infested brood trees on the Academy. Populations of Ips pine engraver beetle and twig beetle have been high during the past several years due to extreme drought conditions. Aggressive management to locate and treat infested trees has been critical in limiting insect spread and tree mortality. Infested trees are cut and chipped, debarked, wrapped in plastic, or hauled to a "safe" location away from susceptible trees before beetles emerge to attack again. Mountain pine beetle populations have decreased 97% over the past five years on the Academy due to the continued high priority placed on bark beetle management.

Bark Beetle Program Coordination with Adjacent Land Ownerships: Diane Strohm worked with the CO State Forest Service to ensure that potential beetle-infested trees on adjacent state-managed lands posing a potential threat to Academy forests were addressed. Steve Wallace inventoried privatized

housing areas on the Academy to locate and arrange for removal of infested trees.

Dwarf Mistletoe Control: Academy staff, along with forestry contractors, salvaged 500 trees (appx.) by removing mistletoe-infected limbs. Pruning limits the spread of this parasitic plant, which weakens trees and predisposes trees to insect attack.

Forest Thinning: Diane Strohm and Steve Wallace are working with a logging contractor to manage a 35-acre area near the Academy Archery Range. Project objective is to enhance forest health by reducing overstocking and removing insect-infested and disease-infected trees.

Invasive Species: Brian Mihlbachler directed the activities of botanists from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program that are conducting noxious weed surveys and monitoring on the Academy. Krystal Phillips coordinated with Texas Agri-Life on shipping of biocontrols for release on Buckley AFB, and placed flagging and signs in critical areas so disturbance and/or mowing of the areas could be avoided.

Stream restoration: Brian Mihlbachler provided a tour to an EPA regulator interested in helping the Academy address off-base stormwater and associated adverse impacts to streams and habitat. Brian is also working with the Air Force Center for Engineering and Environment to solicit a new contract for \$400K of stream restoration work on lower Middle Tributary.

Monitored Williams Lake: Krystal Phillips conducted site visits along the banks of Williams Lake at Buckley AFB to monitor water levels, remove dead fish, ensure solar aerator was functioning and to survey migratory birds.

Lynda Ann Reservoir: Max Canestorp monitored the water level at Lynda Ann Reservoir at PCD which has been dropping since spring, preventing the re-establishment of a fishing program on PCD.

Cultural Resources

Brian Mihlbachler assisted the Civil Engineer Squadron on the Academy with identifying and locating cultural resource sites that may be of interest to Native Americans during this summer's numerous tribal consultations.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP): Max Canestorp submitted the report "Post-Burn Cultural Resource Evaluation of Site 5PE1719", describing a survey of an archaeological site damaged by fire at PCD, to the SHPO and ACHP.

Max Canestorp inventoried historic property at the Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center, in Pueblo, CO, for an exhibit telling the story of PCD's past, present and future.

Public Use and Recreation

Activities on the Academy:

- Directed trail maintenance and repair activities on 13 miles of the Falcon Trail. Work was performed by contract (Arrowhead Trails).
- Stocked rainbow trout into the five Academy fishing lakes.
- Collected names for the 2012 cow elk hunt and conducted a random drawing to select hunters.
- Drafted a letter to the City of Colorado Springs concerning safety concerns with the LaForet Trail access to the New Santa Fe Trail along a city easement.
- Coordinated with the Academy Fire Department to investigate a bicycle accident on the New Santa Fe Trail, resulting in an emergency helicopter evacuation. Brian Mihlbachler will be coordinating with El Paso County Parks to conduct an additional safety review of the entire trail system.
- Discovered an unofficial mountain bike downhill course under construction by Academy cadets. Coordinated with base Safety and the Cadet wing to begin the process of demolishing the course and rehabilitating the area.